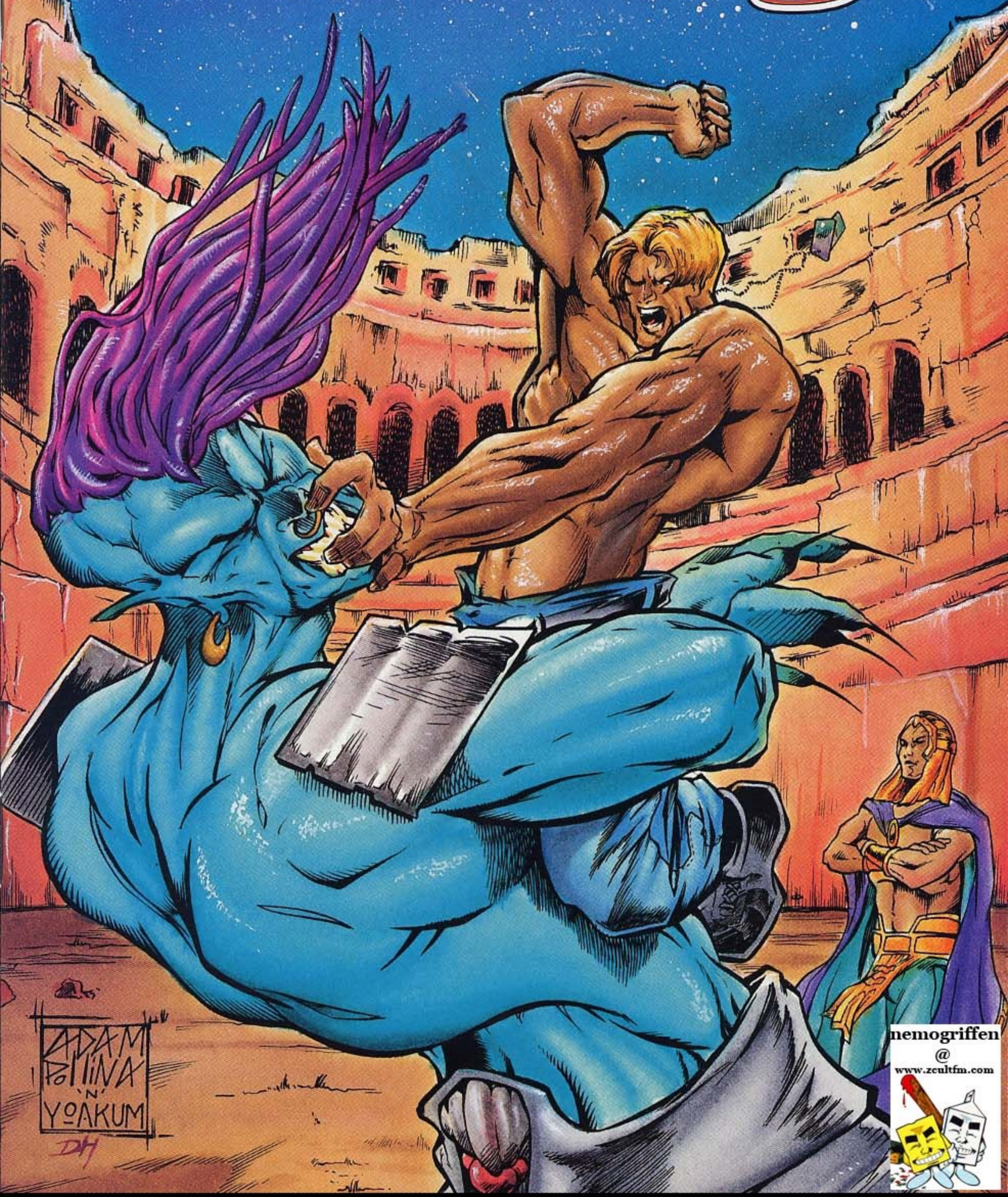


DEFIANT
5
\$2.50
\$3.50 CANADA

CHARLEMAGNE



ADAM
BOLLINA
'N'
YOAKUM
DH

nemogriffen
@
www.zcultfm.com



ONE MAN CAN

THERE'S THIS GUY WHO SAYS HE'S GOING TO DESTROY THE WORLD. HE APPARENTLY HAS THE POWER TO **DO SO**. HE CALLS HIMSELF THE **DANCER**.

RIGHT NOW, HE'S IN A PENTHOUSE APARTMENT IN NEW YORK CITY, GETTING READY FOR THE BIG MOMENT.

THEN THERE'S **CHARLES SMITH**.

HE NEARLY DIED ONCE, BUT CAME BACK FROM THE EDGE OF DEATH.

NOW, THAT ALONE MIGHT MAKE YOU FEEL SPECIAL...

...BUT CHARLES SMITH RETURNED TO LIFE REMADE, WITH AWESOME STRENGTH.

HE FIGURED THERE MUST BE A REASON. AND WHEN HE FOUND OUT ABOUT THE DANCER, HE KNEW WHAT IT WAS.

HE LIVES TO STOP THE DANCER, AND UNTIL HE DOES, NOTHING ELSE MATTERS. HE'S BEEN HUNTING THE GUY.

A SECOND AGO, FROM THE TOP OF A SKYSCRAPER, CHARLES SPOTTED HIM TWENTY STORIES BELOW.

CAN'T WASTE TIME WHEN DESTINY AWAITS. HE DIDN'T EVEN BOTHER YELLING "GERONIMO."

PLOT & SCRIPT BY: JIM SHOOTER AND D.G. CHICHESTER • PENCILER: ADAM POLLINA
LAYOUTS: TIM ELDRED • INKER: CHAD HUNT • LETTERER: M. EISMAN • COLORIST: DAVID HILLMAN
EDITOR: JOSEPH A. JAMES • EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

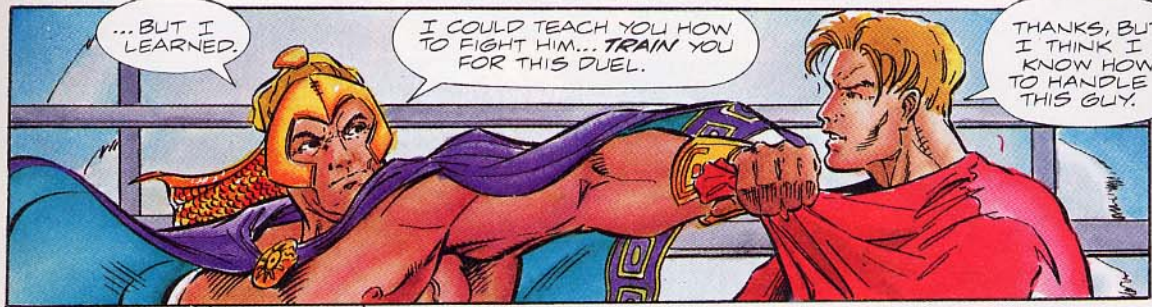




SO YOUNG, SO BRASH, SO BULL-HEADED...

...JUST LIKE I WAS LONG AGO, WHEN I FOUGHT THE DANCER... OVER STAKES LESS APOCALYPTIC BUT NO LESS IMPORTANT TO ME.

I LOST...



...BUT I LEARNED.

I COULD TEACH YOU HOW TO FIGHT HIM... TRAIN YOU FOR THIS DUEL.

THANKS, BUT I THINK I KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THIS GUY.

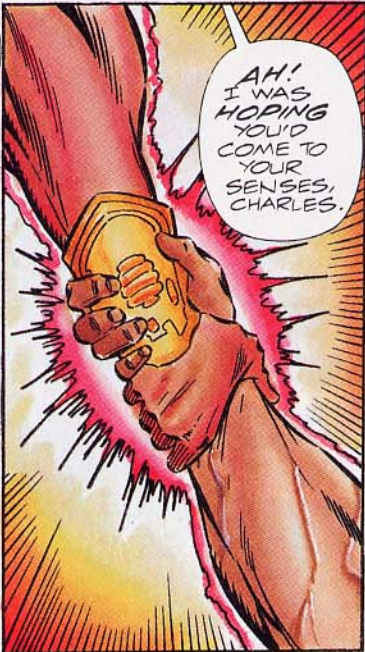


HMF! THEN GO TO IT!

OF COURSE IF YOU'RE WRONG... WELL, THEN WE'RE ALL DEAD, AREN'T WE?

YI-I!!

HEY...HEY, JUST A MINUTE!



AH! I WAS HOPING YOU'D COME TO YOUR SENSES, CHARLES.



WELL, I...I GUESS IT WOULDN'T HURT TO GET A FEW POINTERS, BUT... IT BETTER BE QUICK!

OF COURSE! COME, I'LL TRANSPORT US TO A PLACE WHERE WE CAN... PREPARE YOU!

MEANWHILE, INSIDE THE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT BELOW...



...WHERE WRESTLER BILLY BALLISTIC AND HIS NEW FRIEND-- A GUY WHO CALLS HIMSELF THE DANCER-- WAIT FOR THE LIMO TO BE BROUGHT AROUND...

SINCE YOU'RE NEW IN TOWN, WE'LL DO THE USUAL TOURIST STUFF FIRST, OKAY, DANCER?



THEN, WE'LL... WOW! WHAT WAS THAT LIGHT?

A GOOD OMEN, PERHAPS. I FEEL THAT... A SHADOW HAS BEEN SWEEPED FROM MY PATH.

SOMETIME
LATER...

... CHARLES BEGINS TO
FEEL THE HEAT...

...SEARING
HIM.
COOKING
HIM.

THE HEAT EVOKES THE
MEMORY OF
CRADLING HIS DYING
BROTHER'S CHARRED
AND SMOLDERING
BODY IN HIS ARMS...

...THE MEMORY BILLOWS
LIKE NAPALM INTO A
FIERY NIGHTMARE...

... AND THE NIGHTMARE JOLTS
HIM AWAKE SCREAMING.

AHHH!

HIS CONSCIOUSNESS
SIFTS REALITY FROM
SUBCONSCIOUS
HORROR...

...BUT THE SCORCHING
SUN BEATING DOWN
AND THE CHAINS
BITING HIS FLESH
ARE BARELY
PREFERABLE.

WHAT IS
THIS?

HELLO,
CHARLES.

YOU TRICKED
ME! WHAT DID
YOU DO...
DRUG ME?

YES,
WE
DID!

I'M SORRY I
HAVE TO DO
THIS, CHARLES,
BUT...

...OH, BY THE
WAY THIS IS
MY SERVANT,
IGO.

IT IS AN HONOR
TO MEET CHARLES
SMITH THE
CHAMPION OF
LIFE!

I DIDN'T LIE TO YOU, CHARLES. I DID FIGHT THE DANCER AGES AGO...

...IN MY OWN TIME.

IN FACT, YOU MAY THINK OF **THIS** AS YOUR FIRST LESSON AND FIRST TEST!

I CAN HELP YOU PREPARE, AND I WILL...

WHILE YOU'RE BOUND AND HELPLESS, **MEDITATE** UPON YOUR STRENGTH. EXAMINE IT... COME TO **KNOW** IT...

...AND CONSIDER CAREFULLY ITS LIMITS. A WARRIOR SHOULD KNOW THE **TRUE** EXTENT OF HIS POWER.

LET ME **GO**, AND I'LL SHOW YOU **POWER**!

HMF. MEDITATE ON **THIS**, TOO-- THE DANCER WOULD SNAP THOSE CHAINS EASILY.

COME **BACK** HERE! LET ME **GO**!

RELAX, AND BE GLAD YOU'RE NOT FIGHTING THE DANCER NOW.

I'M SAVING YOUR **BUTT**, BOY!

IS IT WISE, THRAKKAHL, TO INTERFERE WITH THE ONE FATE CHOSE TO BE THE CHAMPION OF LIFE?

MAYBE FATE CHOSE ME TO INTERFERE WITH HIM, I GO.

BESIDES, I'VE BEEN GETTING READY TO COPE WITH THE DANCER FOR **SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS**. I'VE GOT PLANS AFOOT...

...THAT **COULD** GET RID OF THE DANCER'S **REASON** FOR WIPING OUT ALL LIFE.

I DON'T NEED SOME OVEREAGER, OVER-GROWN, UNDER-RIPE, HALF-BAKED KID MESSING THINGS UP.

HMF. AFTER A WHILE OUT IN THIS HEAT, HE'LL BE QUITE **FULLY BAKED**.

THE HEAT MAKES THE DOGTAGS
SIZZLE AGAINST HIS SKIN.

THEY WERE
PETE'S.

CHARLES'
BROTHER.
HIS FRIEND.
HIS HERO.

SEEMED LIKE ONE DAY THEY WERE HOME,
JOKING AT THE FAMILY DINNER TABLE...

...THEN SUDDENLY THEY WERE IN
'NAM, AND WITH BLOODY FINGERS,
CHARLES WAS PULLING THE DOGTAGS
FROM PETE'S BURNING CORPSE.

THEY SIZZLED
IN HIS HAND.

IT
WAS
ALL
SO
UN-
FAIR...

...AND HE WISHED WITH ALL HIS
HEART THAT HE HAD THE POWER
TO DO SOMETHING TO STOP THE
KILLING... STOP DEATH.

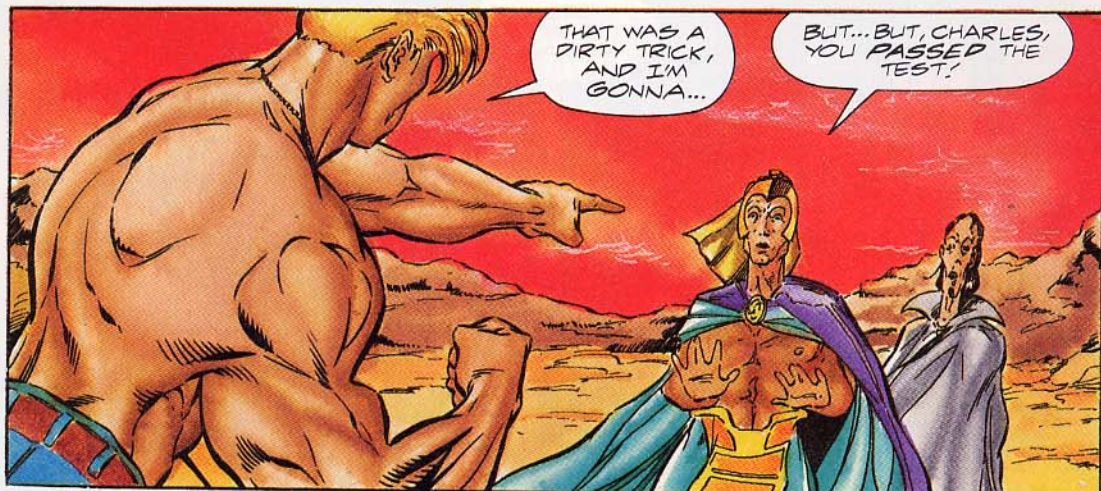
...A LONG TIME LATER, HE
AWAKENED FROM A COMA
WITH POWER INDEED--
MIRACULOUS STRENGTH.

MAYBE MORE THAN HE
KNOWS, HE DECIDES TO
MEDITATE ON HIS STRENGTH.

AND, THEN...

DID YOU
HEAR...





THAT WAS A DIRTY TRICK, AND I'M GONNA...

BUT...BUT, CHARLES, YOU PASSED THE TEST!



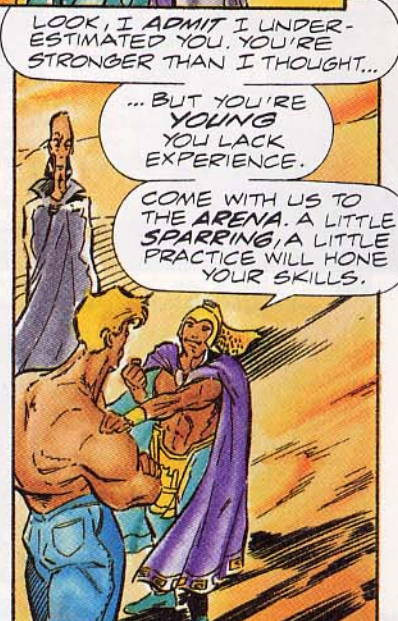
GET ME BACK WHERE YOU FOUND ME... NOW.

DIDN'T YOU FIND STRENGTH WITHIN YOURSELF THAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD?

THERE'S MORE YOU CAN LEARN. MORE YOU SHOULD KNOW!



THE DANCER IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE, YOUNG WARRIOR. KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.



LOOK, I ADMIT I UNDERESTIMATED YOU. YOU'RE STRONGER THAN I THOUGHT...

...BUT YOU'RE YOUNG. YOU LACK EXPERIENCE.

COME WITH US TO THE ARENA. A LITTLE SPARRING, A LITTLE PRACTICE WILL HONE YOUR SKILLS.



OKAY. LET'S GO.

AH, GOOD. THIS WAY.

YOU ARE WISE TO COOPERATE, YOUNG WARRIOR.



OH, I'M WISER THAN YOU GUYS THINK.



WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE WE?

WE AREN'T IN THE WORLD AS YOU KNOW IT, CHARLES.

MANY UNUSAL THINGS LIVE HERE.

THIS IS A QUANTUM ENERGY SUBSTRATUM UNDERLYING THE WORLD YOU THINK OF AS REAL, CHARLES. WE'RE IN A VERY ANCIENT PART OF IT....

LIKE NEVER-NEVER LAND, HUH? I KNEW IT WASN'T KENTUCKY. LOOKS... STRANGE.



LIKE YOU?

HMF. LIKE SEPULCHER.



IS THIS THE STIFF, THRAHKAHL?

HIM?

HUH, BIG. HE'LL NEED AN EXTRA-LONG, EXTRA-WIDE GRAVE.

IF THERE'S ANYTHING LEFT TO BURY.



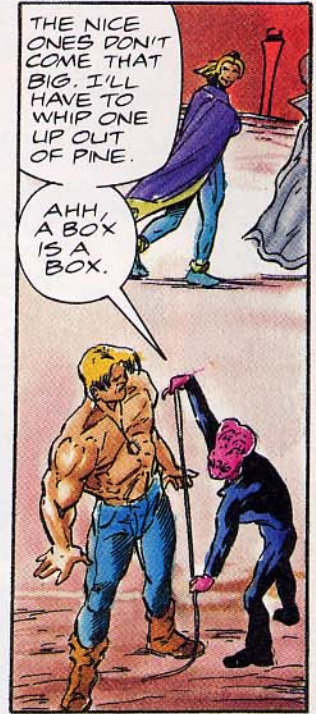
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I'M GOING TO DIE?



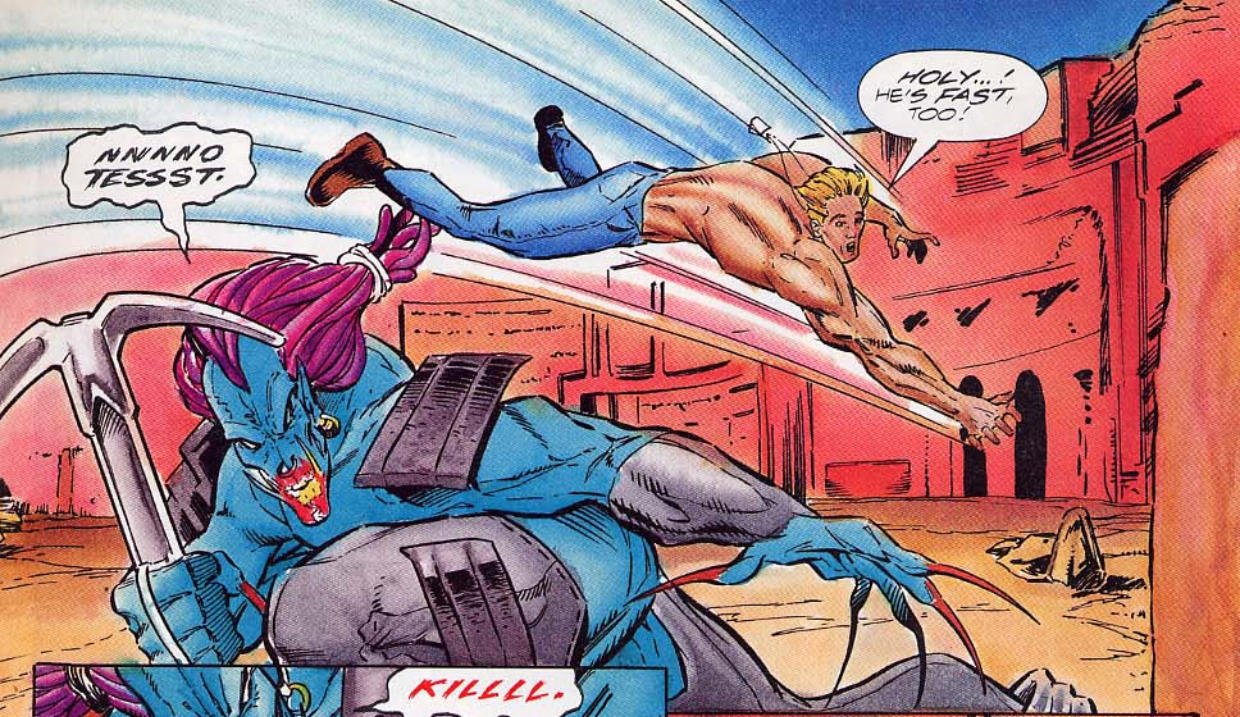
THEY ALL DO. YOU'RE HERE TO TEST YOURSELF AGAINST RABID, RIGHT?

AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT THRAHKAHL SAID.

WHO'S RABID?

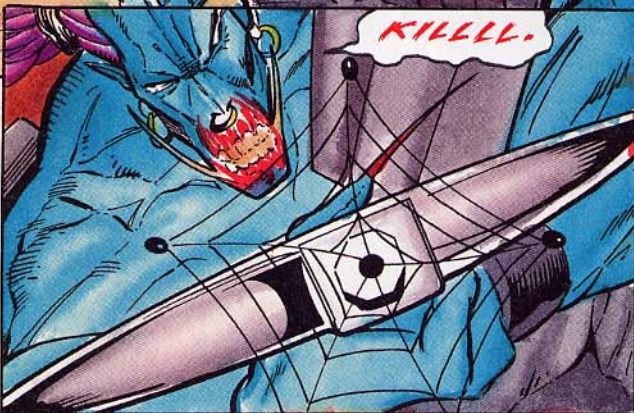




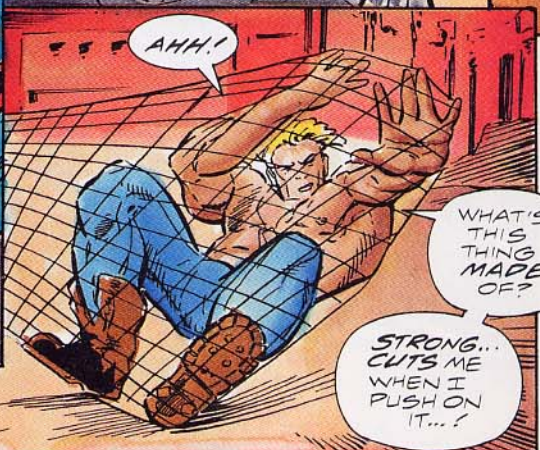


NNNNO
TESSST.

HOLY...!
HE'S FAST,
TOO!



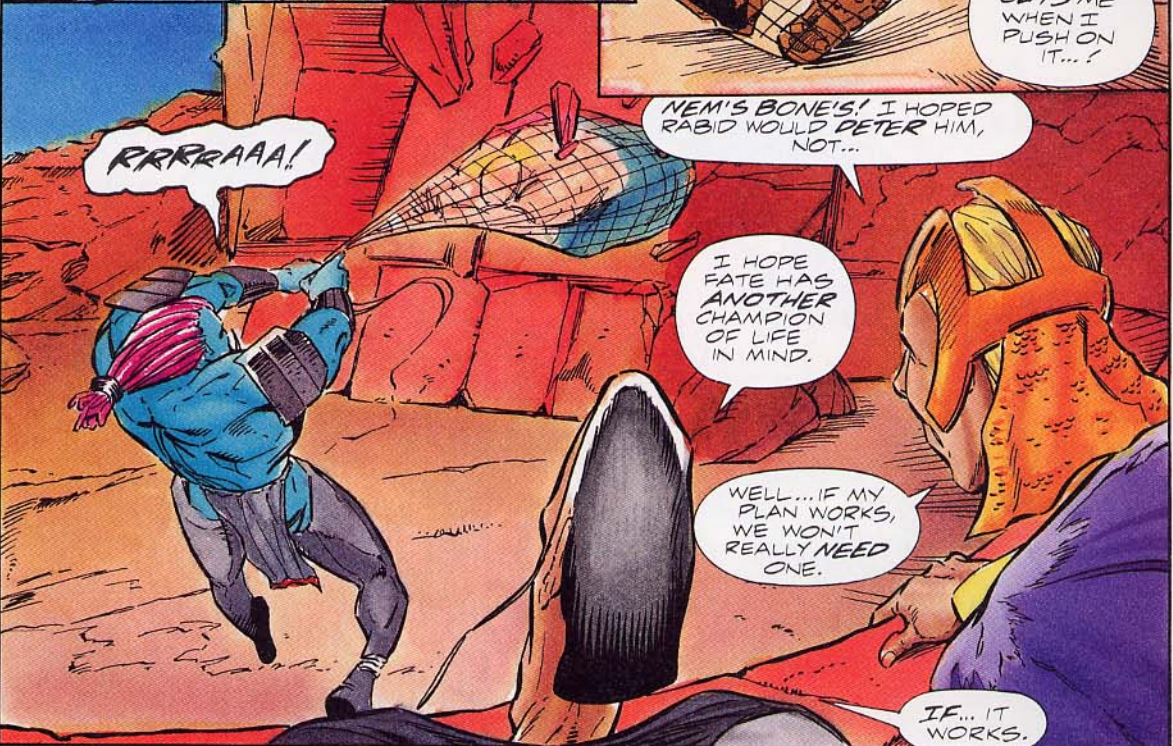
KILLLL.



AHH!

WHAT'S
THIS
THING
MADE
OF?

STRONG...
CUTS ME
WHEN I
PUSH ON
IT...!



RRRRAAA!

NEM'S BONE'S! I HOPED
RABID WOULD PETER HIM,
NOT...

I HOPE
FATE HAS
ANOTHER
CHAMPION
OF LIFE
IN MIND.

WELL...IF MY
PLAN WORKS,
WE WON'T
REALLY NEED
ONE.

IF... IT
WORKS.

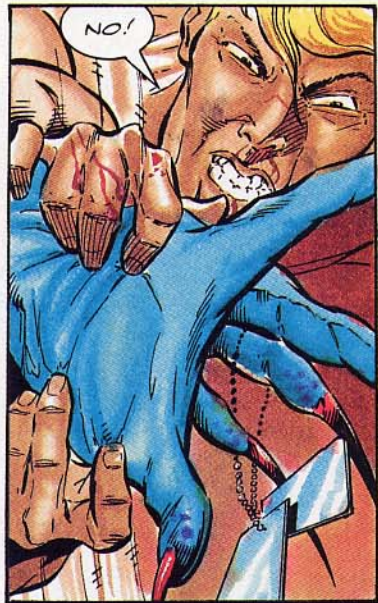


HRRRR.

OW...
AHH...
AHHH....



SHHHHINY.
PRRRIZE.



NO!



THANKS
FOR
REMINDING
ME...

...ABOUT
HIM.
ABOUT
ME.

RRRAOWW!



SECONDS LATER...

DON'T EVEN
THINK ABOUT
GETTING UP.

NNNNNO.

CHARLES, I... I WAS HOPING TO MAKE YOU REALIZE THAT YOU'RE NOT YET READY. I DIDN'T MEAN FOR YOU TO BE SLAUGHTERED. I'M SORRY.

YOU DIDN'T FOOL ME, THRAKKAHL. I KNEW YOU WERE A RAT, BUT I FIGURED IF I COULD DEAL WITH WHATEVER YOU THREW AT ME...

BESIDES, I WON.

HO! FUNNY STUFF

KILL!

GRRRRIND.

THISSS GRRRRUB BEAT UP OURRR LLLITTLE BRRROTHER!

RRRID HIMMM.

OH, GEEZ.

AGAIN, CHARLES, I'M SORRY. I MIGHT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO STOP RABID FROM KILLING YOU, BUT...

...NOW HIS WHOLE FAMILY'S UPSET.

HOURS
LATER...



NOW THIS
IS WHAT I
CALL TRAGIC.

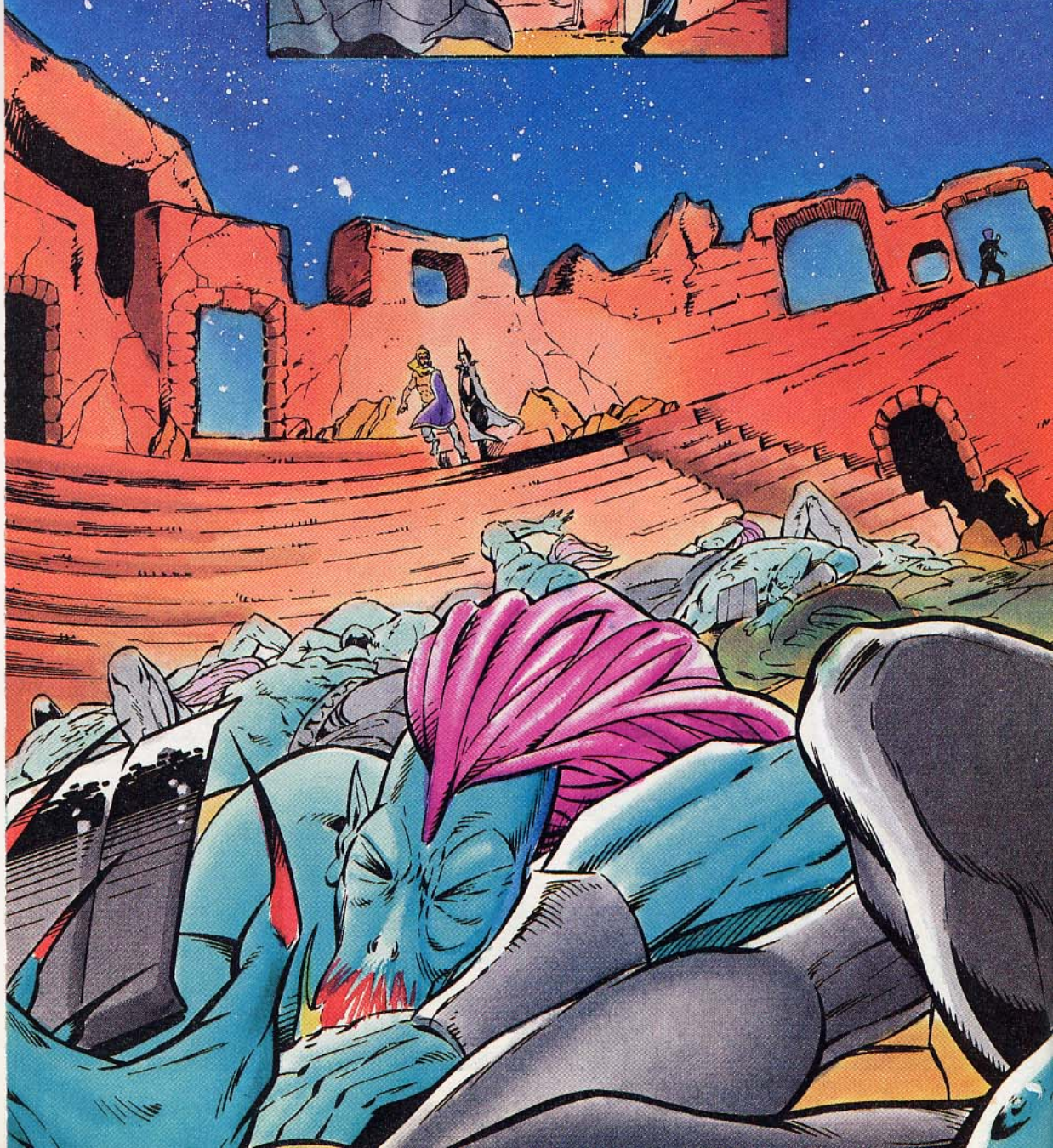
MULTIPLE
CONTUSIONS,
MASSIVE
TRAUMA...

...BUT NO
SALE
FOR ME.



THANKS,
THRAHKAHL.

I LEARNED
TWO THINGS--
NEVER
UNDER-
ESTIMATE AN
OPPONENT...



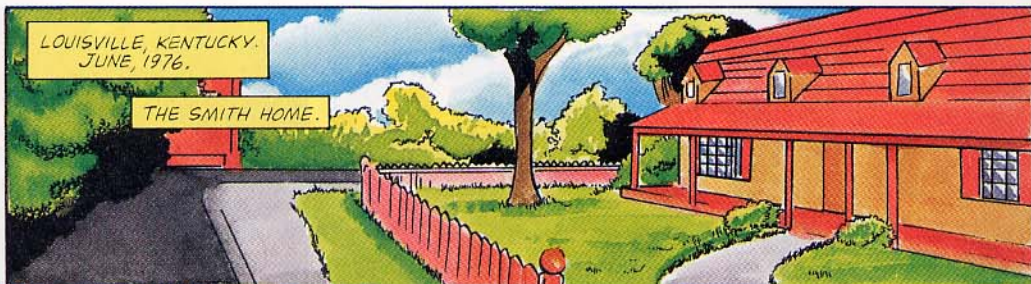


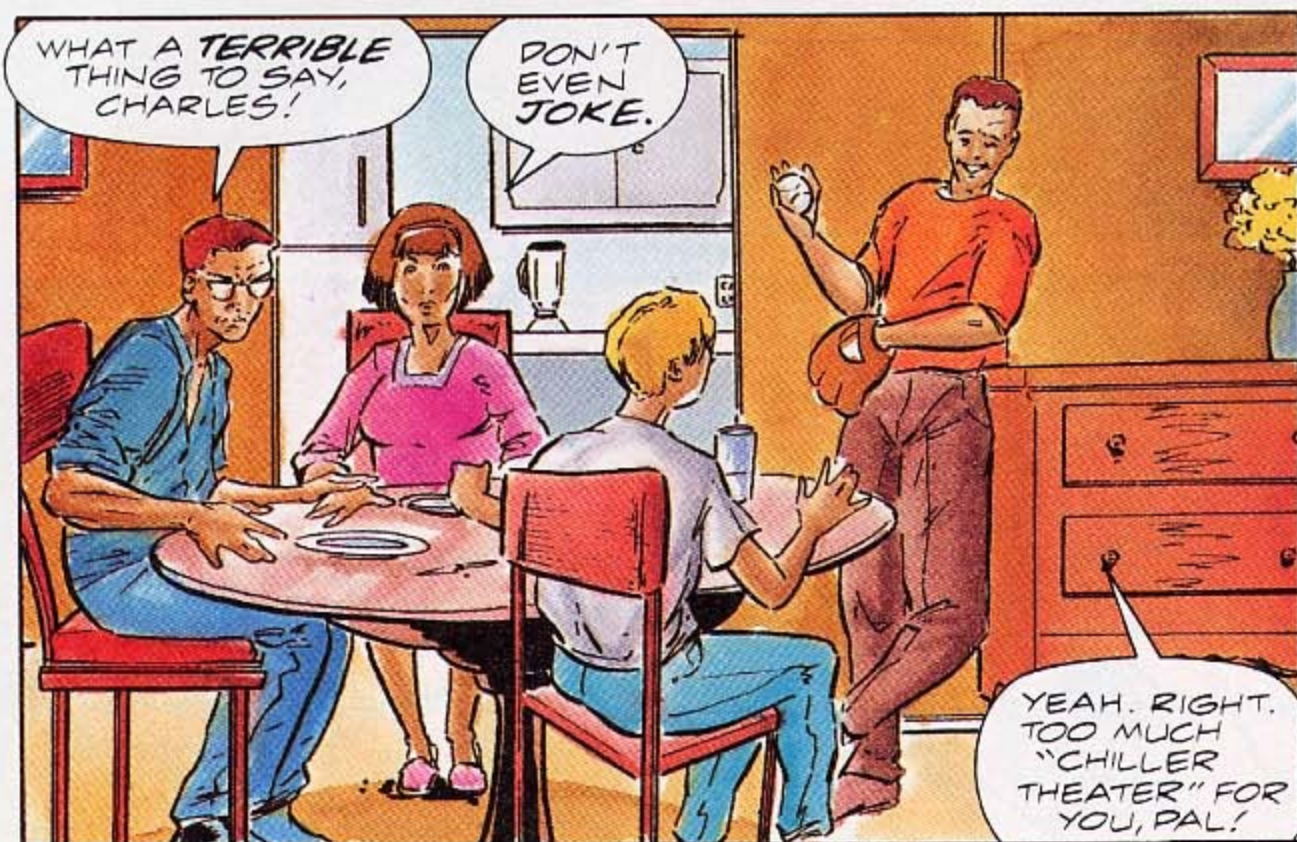
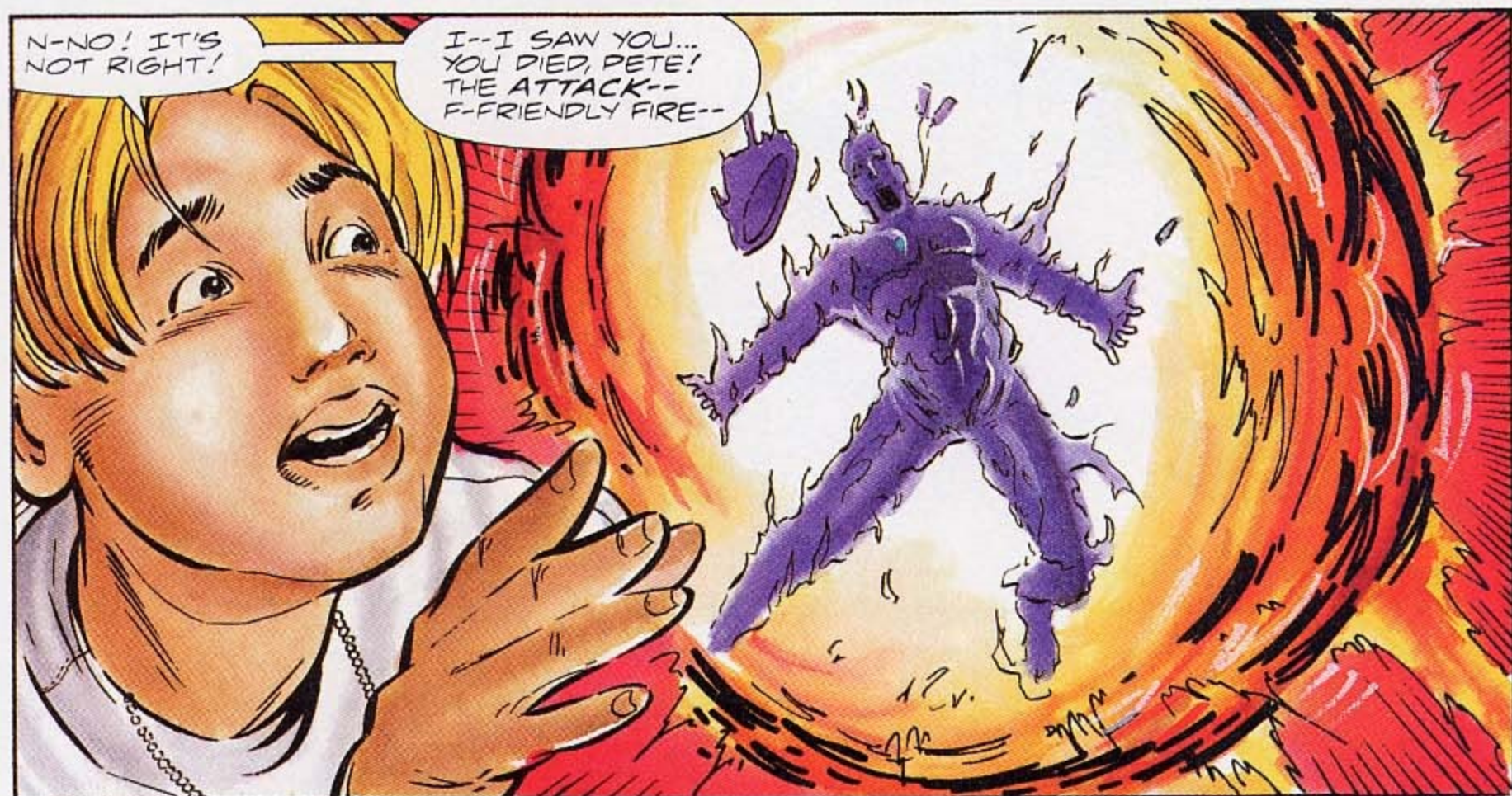
...AND DON'T
WORRY
ABOUT THE
ODDS.

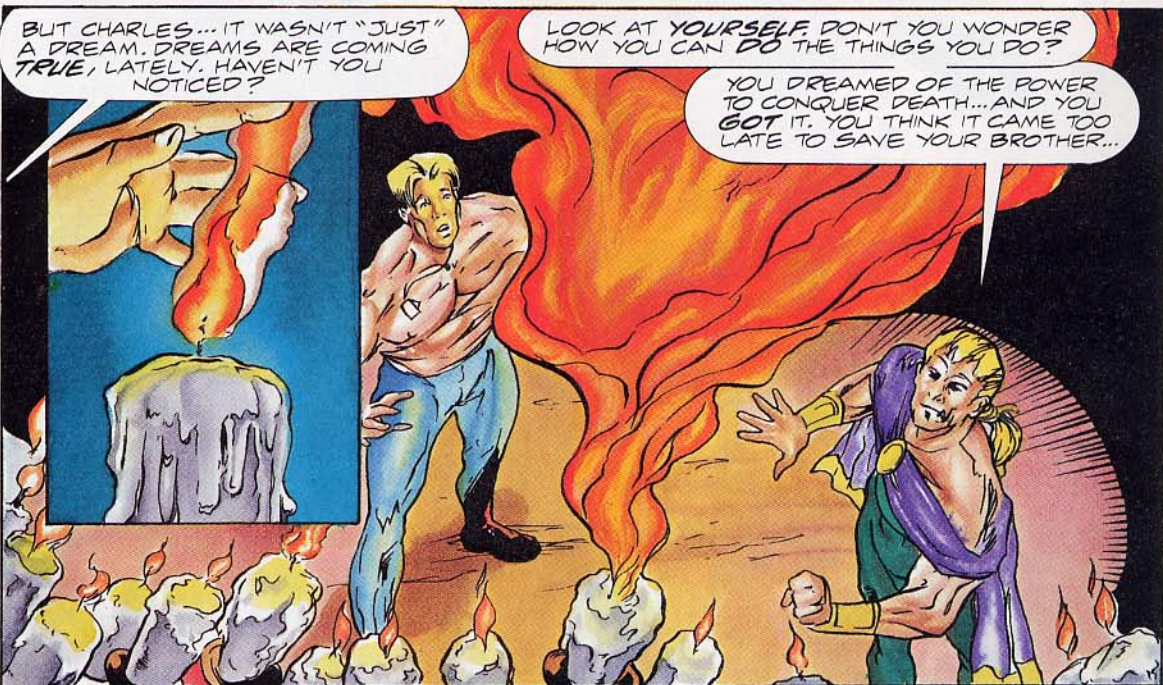
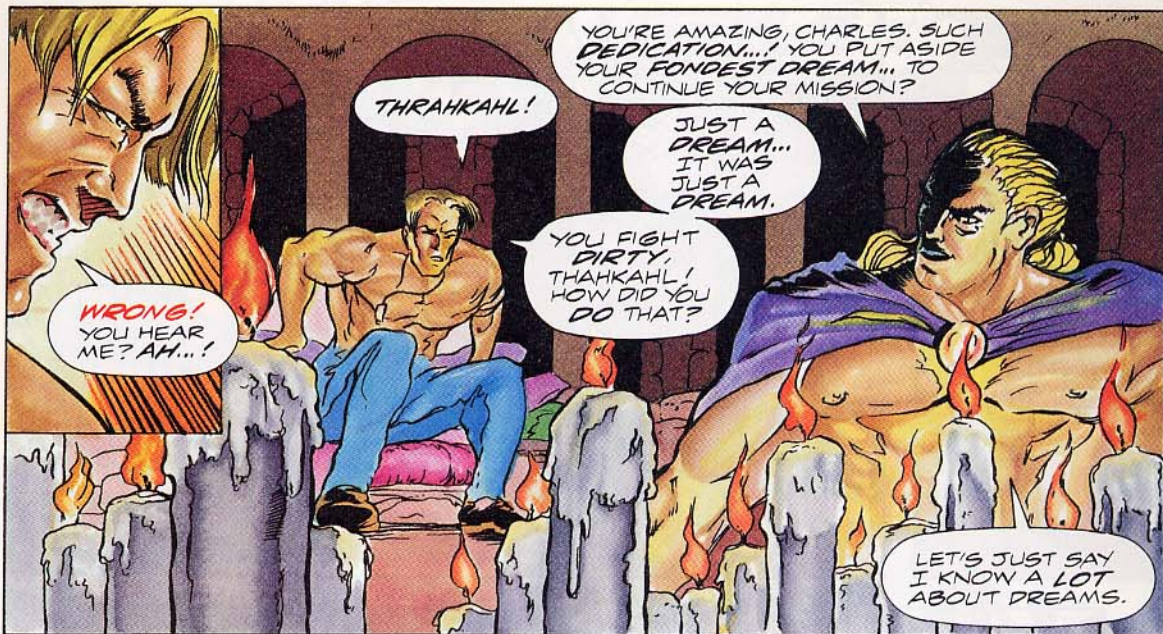
I ALWAYS SAID
IF I THINK I CAN,
I CAN NOW I'M
REALLY CONVINCED.



TEACH ME
SOME
MORE,
MISTER T.







THIS IS A CRITICAL TIME IN THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE, CHARLES.

ALL THE BARRIERS SEPARATING DREAMS AND REALITY ARE FALLING.

DREAMS CAN BE REAL NOW! GO AHEAD, TAKE YOUR BROTHER'S HAND.

BUT... THE DANCER...

THE DANCER... AND I... WERE AMONG THE FIRST DREAMS TO BECOME REAL.

...AND I'M GOING TO STOP HIM.

HE'S A NIGHTMARE. HE SAYS HE'S GOING TO DESTROY THE WORLD...

THAT'S WHAT I THINK OF YOUR CON-JOB MAGIC TRICKS.

CHARLES! PLEASE...! LEAVE THE DANCER TO ME. I HAVE A PLAN...!

YEAH? WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO IN THE FIRST PLACE?

WOULD YOU HAVE LISTENED?

PROBABLY NOT. SEE YA.

YOU... YOU CAN TRAVERSE THE QUANTUM FIELD?

YEP. ONCE I SEE A TRICK A FEW TIMES, I CATCH ON.

CHARLES! CHARLES! WAIT...! DON'T...!

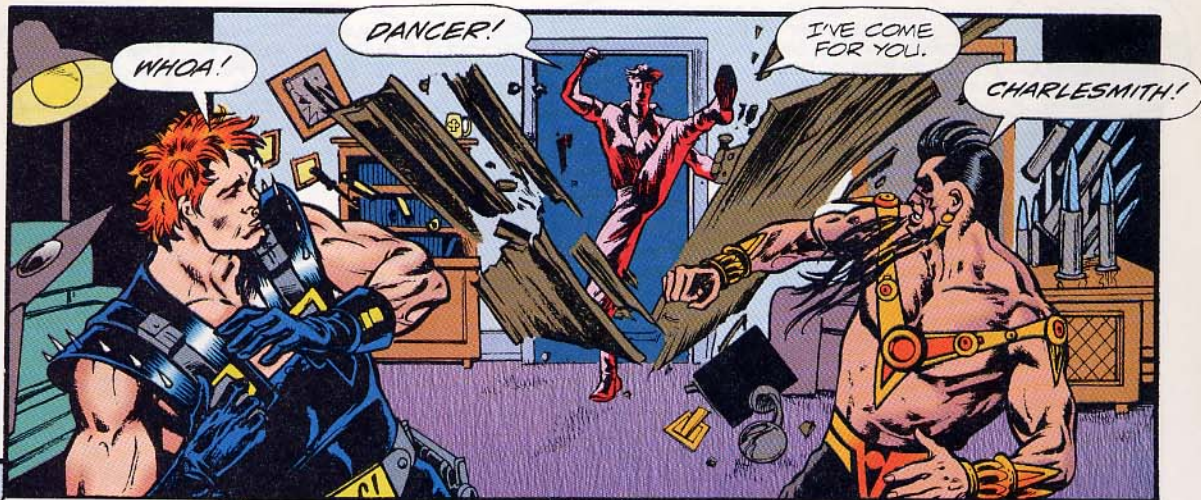
ARRHH!

IF YOU FORCE THE DANCER'S HAND... THE END WILL BEGIN TOO SOON!

I'M NOT READY YET!

NEM'S BONES, CHARLES...!

BULL-HEADED....



WHOA!

DANCER!

I'VE COME FOR YOU.

CHARLESMITH!

YEAH. BUT NOT THE CHARLES SMITH YOU FOUGHT BEFORE.

I'VE LEARNED A LOT... I'VE GOTTEN BETTER... **STRONGER!**

NOW, AT LAST, I'M READY TO BE THE CHAMPION OF LIFE! SO...

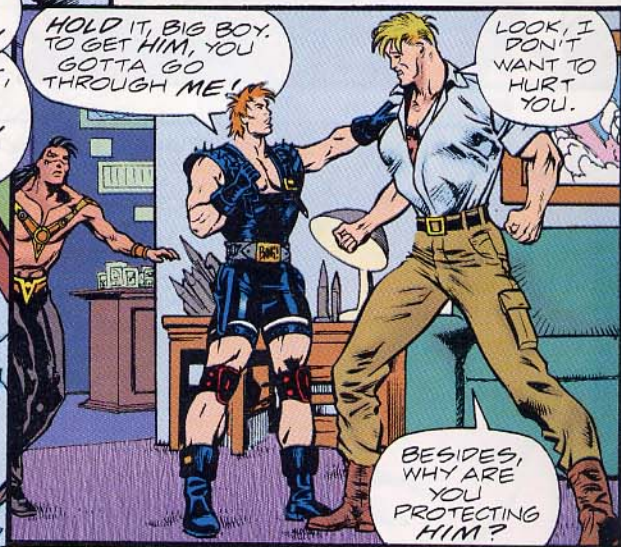
HOLD IT, BIG BOY. TO GET HIM, YOU GOTTA GO THROUGH ME!

LOOK, I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU.



...I CHALLENGE YOU TO RITUAL COMBAT...

...TO THE DEATH!



BESIDES, WHY ARE YOU PROTECTING HIM?



HE'S MY FRIEND, THAT'S WHY! NOW, BACK OFF!

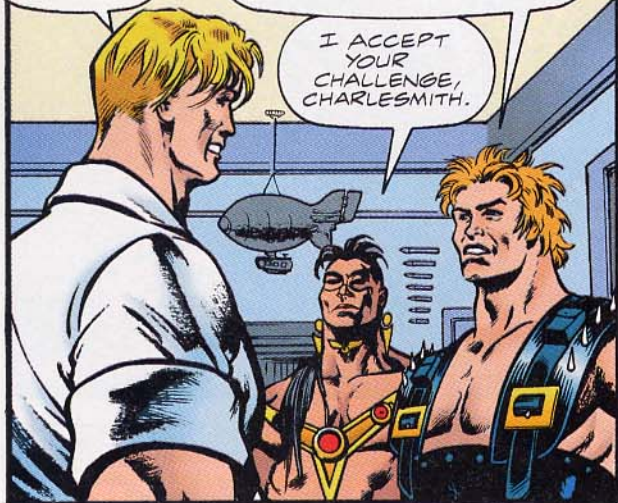
MISTER, YOUR "FRIEND" IS DEATH ITSELF--

--THE END OF THE WORLD ON THE HOOF!

GUESS HE FORGOT TO MENTION THAT TO YOU, HUH?

WELL... NO, HE SAID ONCE OR TWICE THAT HE, UH, MIGHT HAVE TO... UM... YOU KNOW, DESTROY ALL EXISTENCE, BUT...

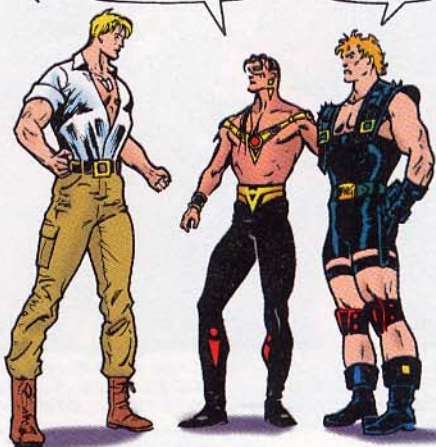
I ACCEPT YOUR CHALLENGE, CHARLESMITH.



GOOD. YOU READY?

A WARRIOR MUST EVER BE READY TO ACCEPT THE WILL OF FATE. FATE HAS BROUGHT YOU HERE NOW...

HOLD IT! THE DANCER'S ALL BUNGLED UP AND UNDONE AND STUFF...



ALL RIGHT... YOU GAVE ME A BREAK ONCE.

...SO I'LL WAIT. A LITTLE WHILE.



WHO THE HECK ARE YOU, ANYWAY?

ACCORDING TO YOUR BUDDY, HERE, I'M THE GUY FATE PICKED TO STOP HIM FROM KILLING EVERYBODY.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT ANY OF THAT, BUT... I KNOW HE'S TROUBLE... BIG TROUBLE...



...AND I CAN STOP HIM.

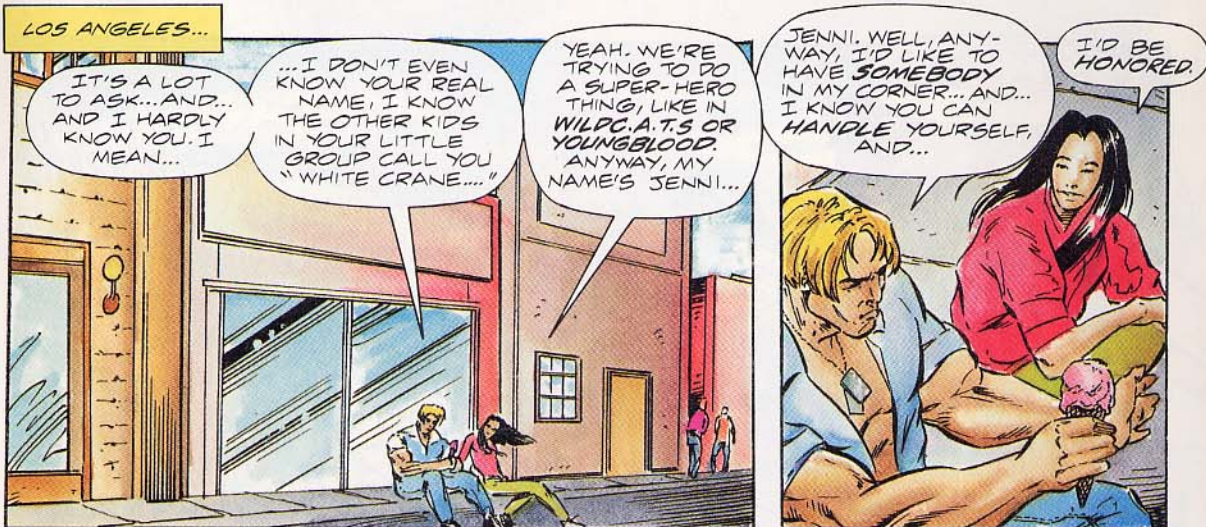
WHEN YOU'RE READY, DANCER... I'LL COME FOR YOU AGAIN.

AHH... DON'T SWEAT IT, DANCER. HE'S A CREAMPUFF.

WHY DON'T YOU CLEAN UP A LITTLE-- YOU KNOW, A NICE HOT SHOWER-- THEN WE'LL FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO ABOUT THAT BOZO...



LOS ANGELES...



IT'S A LOT TO ASK...AND... AND I HARDLY KNOW YOU. I MEAN...

...I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOUR REAL NAME, I KNOW THE OTHER KIDS IN YOUR LITTLE GROUP CALL YOU "WHITE CRANE..."

YEAH. WE'RE TRYING TO DO A SUPER-HERO THING, LIKE IN *WILDC.A.T.S* OR *YOUNGBLOOD*. ANYWAY, MY NAME'S JENNI...

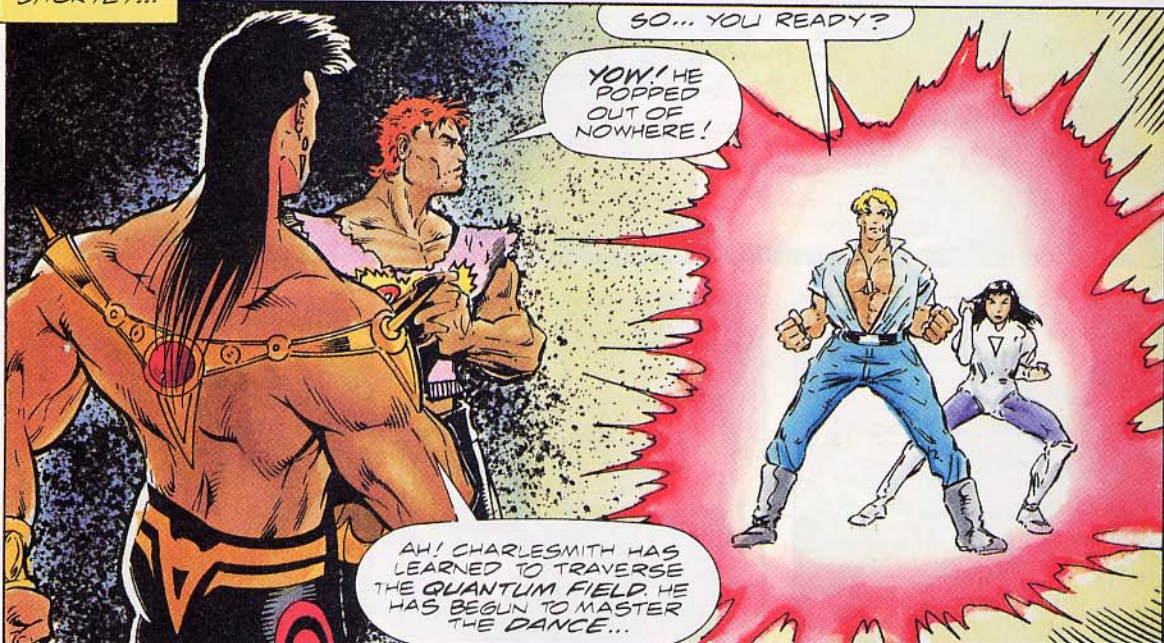
JENNI. WELL, ANYWAY, I'D LIKE TO HAVE **SOMEBODY** IN MY CORNER...AND... I KNOW YOU CAN HANDLE YOURSELF, AND...

I'D BE HONORED.



I HAVE TO CALL **SPELLCASTER** TO GET HIM TO MAGIC ME INTO MY **COSTUME**, THOUGH. BOY, I HOPE HE CAN DO IT OVER THE **PHONE**.

SHORTLY...



SO... YOU READY?

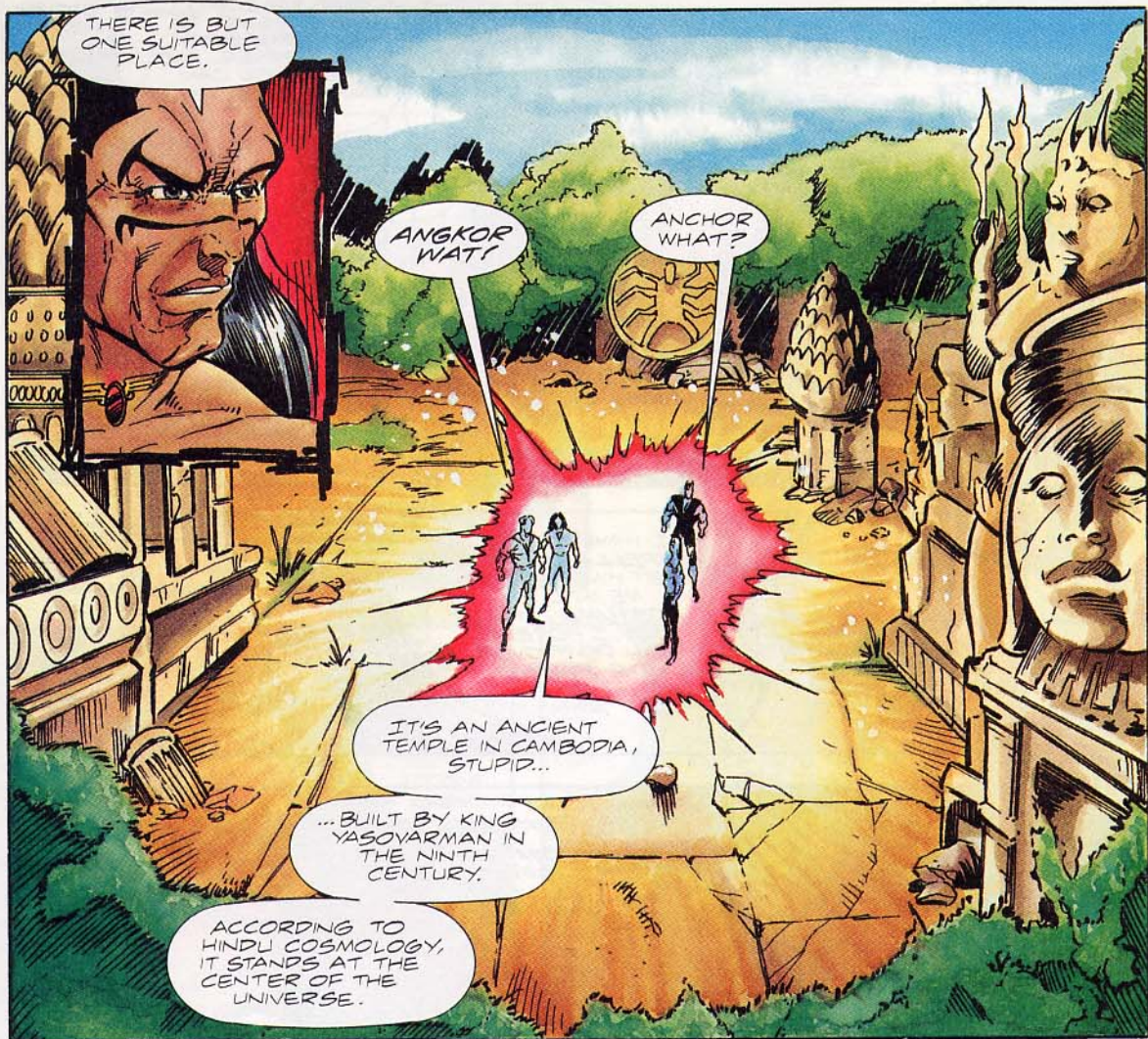
YOW! HE POPPED OUT OF NOWHERE!

AH! CHARLESMITH HAS LEARNED TO TRAVERSE THE **QUANTUM FIELD**. HE HAS BEGUN TO MASTER THE **DANCE**...

...AND SO, NOW HIS POWER **TRULY** RIVALS MINE.

YOU PICK THE PLACE, **DANCER**! JUST THINK OF WHERE YOU WANT TO BE!





THERE IS BUT ONE SUITABLE PLACE.

ANGKOR WAT?

ANCHOR WHAT?

IT'S AN ANCIENT TEMPLE IN CAMBODIA, STUPID...

...BUILT BY KING YASOVARMAN IN THE NINTH CENTURY.

ACCORDING TO HINDU COSMOLOGY, IT STANDS AT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE.



HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THAT?

I'M CAMBODIAN-- WELL, AMERICAN, NOW-- BUT EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT!

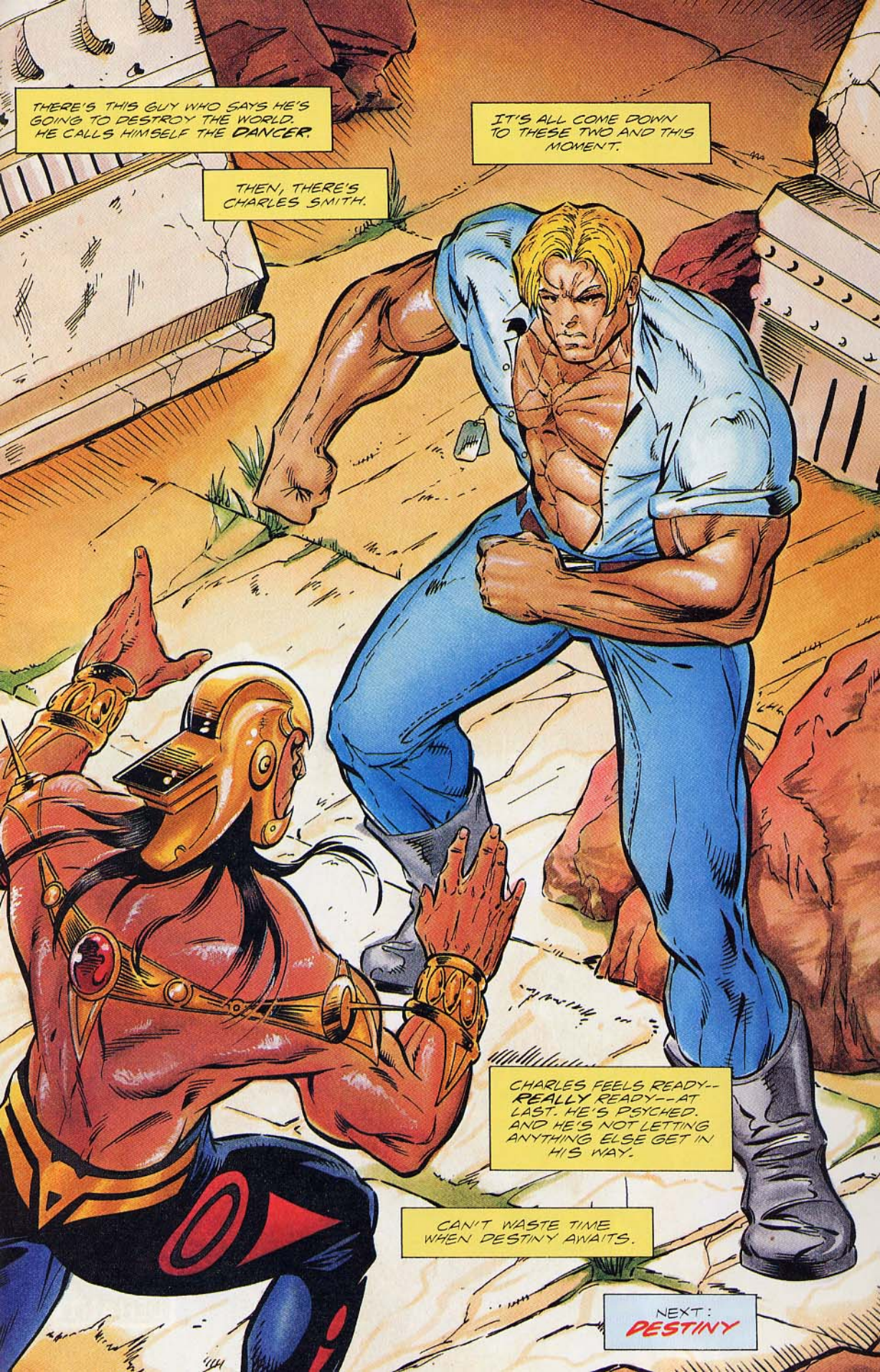


ANY TIME, DANCER. MAKE YOUR MOVE.



YOU ARE AS DEFIANT AS LIFE ITSELF, CHARLESMITH.

ON YOUR GUARD, THEN.



THERE'S THIS GUY WHO SAYS HE'S
GOING TO DESTROY THE WORLD.
HE CALLS HIMSELF THE DANCER.

IT'S ALL COME DOWN
TO THESE TWO AND THIS
MOMENT.

THEN, THERE'S
CHARLES SMITH.

CHARLES FEELS READY--
REALLY READY--AT
LAST. HE'S PSYCHED.
AND HE'S NOT LETTING
ANYTHING ELSE GET IN
HIS WAY.

CAN'T WASTE TIME
WHEN DESTINY AWAITS.

NEXT:
DESTINY